

London is one of the world's most important financial and cultural centers. London has an area of 1579 sq. km. The city of London has been largely rebuilt since World War II, because of German bombing, London remains a city rich in structures with historic associations.

Saint Paul's Cathedral, London's most imposing church, is the burial place of many important British figures, as is Westminster Abbey, a typical example of English Gothic architecture, long the site of coronations and royal weddings. The great complex of buildings known as the Houses of Parliament, still officially called the New Palace of Westminster, serves as the seat for both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. It is distinguished by the clock tower that contains the famous bell Big Ben. The most venerable building in the city is the Tower of London. The Tower has served as a royal residence, state prison, execution ground, and place for royal pageants; the Tower is also the home of the crown jewels. Buckingham Palace has been the official residence of the monarch since 1837. Three other important palaces are Kensington Palace; Lambeth Palace, the London seat of the archbishops of Canterbury; and Hampton Court, the Tudor palace. An important museum in London is the British Museum, which possess one of the finest libraries in the world. Among the many centers of professional theatre in London are the National Theatre, home of the National Theatre Company; the Aldwych Theatre, home of the Royal Shakespeare Company in London until 1982. The main concert halls are the Royal Festival Hall and Queen Elizabeth Hall and the Purcell Room. Opera and ballet are enjoyed especially at the Royal Opera House. London is noted for its plenty of park spaces. The most notable are the Royal Parks. These include Saint James's Park and Green Park, Hyde Park, and Kensington Gardens. As immigrants tended to concentrate in certain parts of the city, these districts became characterized by dominant racial or ethnic groups.